

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

- 1                   1.       A method in a redemption system for determining which awards to  
2 redeem, the method comprising:
  - 3                   maintaining an award history database that includes award transaction  
4 information that describes awards earned by a consumer and, for each earned award, the type  
5 of award;
  - 6                   maintaining an encumbrance database that describes types of awards that  
7 cannot be redeemed at one or more suppliers;
  - 8                   receiving a request to redeem an amount of the earned awards at a chosen  
9 supplier;
  - 10                  determining allowed awards that can be redeemed with the chosen supplier;
  - 11                  determining encumbrance levels of the allowed awards based on the types of  
12 allowed awards and the data in the encumbrance database; and
  - 13                  determining which of the allowed awards to redeem based on the  
14 encumbrance levels.
- 1                   2.       The method of claim 1 wherein determining which of the allowed  
2 awards to redeem is further based on expiration dates of the allowed awards.
- 1                   3.       The method of claim 1 wherein determining which of the allowed  
2 awards to redeem is further based on dates on which the allowed awards were earned.
- 1                   4.       The method of claim 1 wherein the type of award includes according to  
2 which promotion the award was earned.
- 1                   5.       The method of claim 1 wherein the type of award includes from which  
2 business the award was earned.
- 1                   6.       The method of claim 1 wherein the type of award indicates black-out  
2 dates on which the award cannot be redeemed.
- 1                   7.       The method of claim 1 wherein the type of award indicates a  
2 classification of the award.
- 1                   8.       A method in a redemption system for determining which awards to  
2 redeem, the method comprising:

maintaining an award history database that includes award transaction information that describes awards earned by a consumer and including, for each earned award, an expiration date and an earning date;  
receiving a request to redeem an amount of the earned awards;  
determining allowed awards that may be redeemed based on the expiration date; and  
determining which of the allowed awards to redeem based on the earning date.

9. The method of claim 8 wherein the award history database further includes, for each earned award, the type of award, the method further comprising:  
maintaining an encumbrance database that describes restrictions on redeeming types of awards; and  
wherein determining allowed awards is further based on the types of the awards.

10. The method of claim 9 wherein determining which of the allowed awards to redeem is further based on the types of the allowed awards.

11. The method of claim 9 wherein the encumbrance database describes types of awards that cannot be redeemed at one or more suppliers;  
wherein receiving a request to redeem further comprises receiving an indication of a chosen supplier at which to redeem the awards; and  
wherein determining allowed awards is further based on the chosen supplier.

12. The method of claim 9 wherein the type of award depends on the promotion with which the award was earned.

13. The method of claim 9 wherein the type of award depends on the business with which the award was earned.

14. The method of claim 9 wherein the type of award depends on black-out dates on which the award cannot be redeemed.

15. The method of claim 9 wherein the type of award indicates a classification of the award.

16. The method of claim 9 further comprising:

2 determining encumbrance levels of the allowed awards based on the types of  
3 allowed awards and the data in the encumbrance database; and  
4 wherein determining which of the allowed awards to redeem is further based  
5 on the encumbrance levels.

1 17. In a network promotion system, a system for determining which  
2 awards to redeem, the system comprising:  
3 a first memory that stores award transaction information that describes awards  
4 earned by a consumer and, for each earned award, an expiration date and an earning date;  
5 a second memory that stores information related to types of awards that cannot  
6 be redeemed at one or more suppliers;  
7 a processor coupled to the first memory and the second memory and operable  
8 to perform the steps of:  
9 receiving a request to redeem an amount of the earned awards at a  
10 chosen supplier;  
11 determining allowed awards that can be redeemed at the chosen  
12 supplier; and  
13 determining encumbrance levels of the allowed awards based on the  
14 types of allowed awards and the data in the encumbrance  
15 database; and  
16 determining which of the allowed awards to redeem based on the  
17 encumbrance levels..

1 18. The system of claim 17 wherein the first memory and the second  
2 memory are a common memory with storage areas for award transaction information and  
3 information related to types of awards that cannot be redeemed at one or more suppliers.

1 19. In a network promotion system, a system for determining which  
2 awards to redeem, the system comprising:  
3 an award history database that stores award transaction information that  
4 describes awards earned by a consumer and, for each earned award, an expiration date and an  
5 earning date; and  
6 a processor coupled to the award history database and operable to perform the  
7 steps of:  
8 A) receiving a request to redeem an amount of the earned awards;

9                   B)       determining allowed awards that may be redeemed based on  
10                   the expiration date; and  
11                   C)       determining which of the allowed awards to redeem based on  
12                   the earning date.

1                    20.     The system of claim 19 further comprising an encumbrance database  
2     that describes restrictions on redeeming types of awards;  
3                    wherein the processor is coupled with the encumbrance database; and  
4                    wherein the processor is configured to determine allowed awards further based  
5     on the types of awards.

1           21.     The system of claim 20 wherein determining which of the allowed  
2     awards to redeem is further based on the types of the allowed awards.